

# St. Paul's and the Civil War

The sesquicentennial of the Civil War seems an appropriate time to reflect on St. Paul's Church National Historic Site and the epic struggle of 1861 – 1865. The site's connection to the war which commenced 150 years ago resonates through the historic cemetery, one of the nation's oldest burial yards, and the gravestones for scores of Union soldiers scattered around the five acre field.

These men placed their lives on hold, fought and struggled in the blue uniforms, but lived through the war between the North and the South, returning to civilian life in the area, raising families, pursuing occupations, and often remaining active in veterans' affairs. They died, usually through natural causes, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fighting in the war for the Union was a cornerstone of their lives, and they claimed a final testament of their service -- a veterans' stone.



These veterans, or their families, wanted posterity to recall their sacrifices, and claimed government stones recording information about their military service. The government financed burial stone originated after the Civil War, as part of the social responsibility of the Union to the veterans. The markers were originally available only for men killed in battle and buried in national cemeteries, but the monument was extended to all veterans by an act of Congress in 1879, leading to the introduction of the veteran's stone in private cemeteries, such as St. Paul's.

Collectively, these Americans galloped into cavalry battles in the Eastern theatre of war; maintained the engines of Union ships fighting on the Mississippi River; withstood Confederate assaults at the Battle of Gettysburg; engaged in some of the war's fiercest fighting in the Virginia campaigns of 1864; marched on Atlanta with General Sherman; defended Washington D.C.; secured Richmond when the Confederate capital fell in April 1865, and treated wounded soldiers.

One regiment, the New York 6<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery, is especially well represented here. Raised in the summer of 1862 in response to President Lincoln's call for an additional 300,000 troops, the 6th gathered hundreds of recruits from Westchester County, including enlistment on the village green at St. Paul's. Originally assigned garrison duty around the nation's capital, the heavies fought as dismounted infantry in the Virginia campaign of 1864. Six soldiers of the unit are interred in the yard, including Corporal Joseph Gallaudet, a 23-year-old, single Mt. Vernon resident who was wounded in June 1864, requiring surgeons to extract two pieces of iron from his left thigh.

A bronze plaque affixed to an exterior wall of the church recalls that St. Paul's was home to Farnsworth Post 170 of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union veterans' group which was an enormously important social and political organization. More than 150 veterans from across southern Westchester County joined the post, including many who are buried in the graveyard. In addition to maintaining the memory of shared sacrifice and camaraderie, members led funerals for their comrades and provided financial assistance to widows. Post members organized Memorial Day (Decoration Day) commemorations at St. Paul's; the bronze tablet was bolted into the church on Memorial Day in 1922, in concurrence with the passing of the last group of Post members.



**Farnsworth Post 170, G.A.R., at St. Paul's, Memorial Day, c. 1890.**

Civil War veterans interred at St. Paul include several who served with the Union navy, among them Michael McLaughlin. Born in Ireland, McLaughlin immigrated to Massachusetts in the 1850s as a teenager, and developed practical skills which made him a valuable mechanic for the Union navy. Enlisting in April 1862, Assistant Engineer McLaughlin helped maintain the steam engine powering the recently launched, 803-ton *U.S.S. Genesse*, which patrolled the blockade line in the North Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, under Admiral David Farragut. McLaughlin was also below deck monitoring the engines when the 209-foot steamer participated in the pivotal siege of Vicksburg on the Mississippi River under General Ulysses Grant in 1863.



Discharged in New York City, McLaughlin's skills sharpened during the war helped the blue eyed veteran gain employment with the Ward steamship line. Remaining in the nation's largest city also gave McLaughlin, an Irish Catholic, the occasion to pursue the unusual late 19<sup>th</sup> century move of marrying outside his religion, wedding a woman of the Protestant Episcopal faith, Pauline Tigh, whose family had worshipped at St. Paul's Church. The McLaughlin's enjoyed a long marriage, raising their large family in

Brooklyn. Perhaps because of his immigrant roots, McLaughlin also developed a shared sense of Pauline's heritage, assuming ownership of the Tigh family plot in the St. Paul's cemetery, where three McLaughlin children who died young were buried. When the navy veteran passed in 1912

at age 75, his widow purchased an additional plot behind the church, and McLaughlin was memorialized through a large granite monument commemorating his wartime experience.

Several of the Union veterans were enslaved in 1861. Gaining freedom during the war, these soldiers served in the United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.), the name applied to the all-black regiments formed in 1863, and joined the migration of African Americans from the rural South to the North in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They include George Carter, who was born in Virginia in 1842. He



escaped to Fortress Monroe at the beginning of the conflict, and married a woman named Rosa Quales, who had also fled from slavery. Carter enlisted in Company C, 10<sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S.C.T. in October 1863. The unit engaged in the Virginia campaign of May-June 1864, and helped capture Fort Powhattan. The 10<sup>th</sup> was also involved in the grueling siege of Petersburg, and was among the Union regiments to enter Richmond in early April 1865, as the Confederate capital fell. Seeking a better life, the Carters traveled north, and lived in Babylon, Long Island before moving to Mt. Vernon in the 1880s. George worked as a head gardener on a large estate in nearby Eastchester, and died December 13, 1902, survived by four children, and commemorated with a veteran's stone.

Reflecting the geographical mobility of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans, some of the monuments dotting the graveyard list regiments from Maine, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Vermont, among other states. Joseph Fardette, a dark haired carpenter who served with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers, was captured at the Battle of Mechanicsville in late June 1862, serving a month as a prisoner in Richmond before being paroled and exchanged, and wounded at the Second Battle of Bull Run in late August 1862. Still working as a carpenter, Fardette moved to Mt. Vernon in 1892, passing in 1917, at age 77, his grave marked with a stone recording his Pennsylvania unit. Charles Lee Wilson fought with the 35<sup>th</sup> Ohio at the Battle of Lookout Mountain in Tennessee in November 1863, and campaigned in Georgia under General William T. Sherman in 1864, entering Atlanta in early September, one of the most important Northern victories. Wilson moved to Mt. Vernon following his discharge, and died March 11, 1866, from disease contracted during the conflict.

In addition, the St. Paul's cemetery reflects the difficult adjustments faced by many Union veterans. After completing two years with the 17<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry (a Zouave regiment), and sustaining wounds at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Private Hiram Slagle struggled in his return to civilian life, for reasons not entirely clear. Abandoning his wife, the former cobbler survived marginally for years in Mt. Vernon, homeless, earning meager pay by



selling clams or mushrooms. Found unconscious January 14, 1901 after tumbling down a flight of stairs, Slagle was transported via horse-drawn ambulance to Mt. Vernon Hospital, but never regained consciousness. A search of his clothing revealed his Union army honorable discharge papers, a proud memory he preserved despite the downturn in his life.

An indigent, Slagle was interred at city expense in an unmarked grave in a section of the St. Paul's cemetery used as a pauper's field. In 2008, more than 100 years after his death, a granite veteran's stone was set at his burial location.

The yard echoes with many other sobering, inspiring and interesting stories capturing the tremendous range of Civil War experiences. During the celebration of the sesquicentennial, we invite visitors to explore the lives of these Americans as part of a broader effort to understand a remarkable chapter in our nation's history.